

Testimony Opposing CMHC Budget Cuts

My name is Dr. Kristin Budde. I'm a psychiatry resident at Yale, and I have a master's degree in public health. I'm writing to oppose the proposed CMHC budget cuts.

Let me tell you about Walter. Walter was in his fifties, with a silvery bowl cut and a limp that required a cane. I met him on the inpatient unit at CMHC, not long after a suicide attempt.

He was a bookish fellow, always reading something esoteric like "The Cloud Atlas" and waxing philosophical when he wasn't feeling too sad. When he was listening to what you said he would cock his head to the side.

He'd been depressed for years, but this time was the worst. I worked with him for three months. Every day we met to plan his discharge, and he'd sneak in a few minutes about what he was reading.

Our plan had always been to send him to a transitional living program, where patients get something between inpatient care and a room of their own. It's perfect for people like Walter, who are really sick and need something in between home and inpatient.

But while he was in our hospital, last year's budget cuts hit. No more transitional living spots.

So we kept him inpatient for a few more months. We were still worried.

Eventually we had to discharge him (nobody can stay inpatient forever). He went to an apartment not far from the bookstore he loved.

He's not here today to testify because he's dead. As we feared, a few days after his discharge someone found him in his apartment. Suicide.

My professional opinion is that if we'd been able to send him to the transitional program he needed, he'd likely be here to talk to all of us. Which would be great. Because he had such a lovely way with words.

So when you think about cutting funding to CMHC, remember that these dollars are coming from the most vulnerable people in Connecticut.

It's not you or me who'll suffer. It's people like Walter. Quiet, book-loving souls who desperately need a little more help than we're willing to give.